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DISCUSSIONS.

DETERMINISM AND INDETERMINISM IN MOTIVES : A REPLY.

Mr. G. W. Cunningham's discussion¹ of my article on "Determinism and Indeterminism in Motives"² presents some interesting general phases of criticism, as well as some important technicalities. He begins by saying frankly that one's conclusions depend considerably upon one's point of departure, and he indicates his own position, namely, a widely held metaphysical theory which lays great stress upon the methodological character of science, and holds in particular that absolute determinism is an implication of this methodology. His purpose is to show that the "existential standpoint" which he attributes to me leads to difficulties from which his own outlook offers the only means of escape.

The first of the difficulties is "an absolute separation of the will from the motive" and "a conception of the two as only externally related." Such abstractions, he observes, not only have obviously no real existence, but also, if taken seriously, make philosophy impossible, since they have no determinate relation to experience. Now this alleged difficulty exists largely in the imagination of my critic. That motives really antedate decision, and are thereby causes of it, is in my judgment a trustworthy and final report of experience. This measure of 'externality' cannot be removed without contradicting the facts or giving them some transcendental, 'timeless' interpretation. But that this way of stating the facts implies that the motive wholly lacks volitional character, or that the motive is entirely past before decision occurs, or that the volitional decision has no inherent motive character, or is superimposed upon the motives from the outside, — all this is as foreign to my own presuppositions as to those of Mr. Cunningham. Indeed, I tried to make this clear by saying: "It is unfortunate that some indeterminist writers designate the will as a supplementary and deciding factor. This gives the impression that the will works externally upon the motives," etc.³ The terms which I use in description of the process are necessarily 'abstractions,' and the plane of that description is in a sense

¹ THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, Vol. XVI, pp. 616 ff.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 298 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

'existential' ; but the alleged separation and hypostasization, with their attendant absurdities, to which Mr. Cunningham refers, are interpretative contributions of his own. There is a genuinely metaphysical view that just such descriptive abstractions, with their involved time-relations, tell the truth about reality ; and, in particular, that the psychological concepts of the will and its motives are to be discussed on the existential plane without prejudice from any other methodology. The first difficulty, therefore, which Mr. Cunningham finds in my account, is partly a misinterpretation, and partly an inconsistency with an epistemological view which by no means enjoys universal acceptance.

The second alleged difficulty is purely epistemological. Mr. Cunningham says : " If . . . causality means general intelligibility of phenomena, the question concerning its absoluteness becomes . . . one, a negative answer to which renders knowledge itself impossible." ¹ And again : " Kant long ago and with unmistakable clearness taught us that in the realm of experience causality is supreme and chance an absurdity." . . . " An undetermined event is an epistemological impossibility." ² But the premise here is just what many question. Causality does not mean general intelligibility ; and however vital its function in intelligence may be, it is perfect dogmatism to declare that the time sequence of motives and decision becomes unintelligible unless we assume absolute determinism. In taking such a position, Mr. Cunningham is clearly prejudiced by the thought that, if chance is real, it is absolute. Indeed, he says explicitly : " If there is a realm of chance, it is *ipso facto* absolute, since otherwise it would be a realm of law." ³ On the logic of this, I will not comment further than to say again that it is no more sound in reference to law and chance than to likeness and difference. What I wish to point out is that this notion of 'realms' of law and chance, and of indeterminism as a theory of exceptions to law, is entirely a perversion of my statements. I said explicitly that chance is not an exception to law, but a partial aspect of every (partially lawful) event. ⁴ Accordingly, this second difficulty which Mr. Cunningham finds in my statements seems, like the first one, to consist largely in his misinterpretation of them, and partly in their disagreement, not with the facts, but with a certain theory about the facts.

Mr. Cunningham concludes by offering an exposition of " the more concrete teleological point of view." The central thought of this is :

¹ P. 619.

² P. 620.

³ P. 619.

⁴ Pp. 308, 309

“Psychology has to do with only one aspect of the mental life, the time order aspect ; meaning and purpose, although they are indisputably important aspects of the mind, are intentionally left entirely out of account.”¹ Now against this I would say that such a divorce between purpose and the time order of mental facts seems to many students of the matter entirely fictitious. A number of realists, pragmatists, and other hardened heretics and sinners raise a volume of protest which cannot be disregarded, as Mr. Cunningham seems to disregard it in his concluding paragraph, when he says : “At the present stage of our scientific and philosophical development, one may even be somewhat dogmatic in asserting that . . . the only rational solution of the problem of human volition lies in the direction of the teleological categories . . . freedom *in* necessity.” Now, while this disagreement is not at all a refutation of the methodology to which Mr. Cunningham adheres, it is most unquestionably a final reason for not making this methodology a basis of criticism. In the foregoing remarks, I have not tried to establish my conception of indeterminism, — that was the effort of my article, — or to demonstrate that my critic’s methodology is unsound, but only to show that criticism based upon a partizan metaphysical theory is disqualified from the start. Such criticism contains misrepresentations due to hasty oversight, and is ever harking back to the assumed authority of its own foundation. What it demolishes is almost invariably some more or less grotesque caricature of its object. And I personally have a shrewd suspicion that the very assumption of such a critical standpoint is a psychical event in the time order, which is in reality partly determined and partly a matter of chance. That this explanation does not thereby render it irrational or unethical is probably another point of disagreement.

In view of these considerations, it appears clear that, if controversies about experience are susceptible of being settled, then this possibility rests upon the common experience of both parties. Perhaps philosophical controversies cannot be settled, just for this reason ; but there is obviously no other hope. Such a common basis of discussion, if any exists, is found on the plane of daily experience, which is at the same time existential, functional, and teleological. Given facts and such extensions only as have common acceptance are the indispensable requirement of debate.

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